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TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: GUATEMALA'S NOMINEE FOR 2009 SECRETARY'S AWARD FOR
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: A. STATE 99729

[B](#). GUATEMALA 1333

[C](#). GUATEMALA 134

[1](#). Embassy is pleased to nominate Norma Cruz, Director of NGO Survivors Foundation, as Guatemala's "Woman of Courage" for the 2009 Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage (ref A) in recognition of her exceptional courage, strength, and leadership in advocating for women's rights and advancement in Guatemala.

[2](#). Biographical information and justification for award:

Full Name: Norma Angelica Cruz Cordova
Title/Association: Director, Fundacion Sobrevivientes
(Survivors Foundation)
Date of birth: August 24, 1962
Country of birth: Guatemala
Citizenship: Guatemala
Address: 12 Calle 11-63 zone 1, Guatemala City 01001
Telephone: (502) 2230-4222, (502) 2251-9931
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Throughout her life, Norma Cruz has fought for human rights and justice for the underprivileged. She was recruited into the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) at the age of 12. We have no information to suggest that she was involved in any acts of violence, and her membership in the EGP was only when she was very young. The Embassy would not normally propose a candidate who had had an affiliation with an illegal armed group; however, we believe her subsequent public service outweighs any concerns over her EGP membership when she was an adolescent. A search of all Embassy agency databases revealed no derogatory information.

When Cruz discovered that her daughter had been sexually abused for five years (1991-1996) since the age of seven by her then domestic partner (a former insurgent commander), Cruz left the armed conflict to fight a different kind of war -- a war against criminal impunity and those who abuse and murder women. In 1999, Cruz initiated legal action against the former URNG leader, breaking the wall of silence and bringing to public light a reality affecting thousands of Guatemalan children. In 2002, after a long, public three-year battle for justice, Cruz secured a conviction and a 20-year prison sentence. (In March 2003, the sentence was reduced to 8 years, and the defendant was released earlier this year and was recently named to the Board of Directors of the Guatemalan Indigenous Development Fund.) In 2001, during the legal process, Cruz and her daughter Claudia Maria Hernandez created "Sobrevivientes" (Survivors) as a support group for victims of violence and families of sexually abused and murdered women who, like themselves, were seeking justice. In January 2003, the group obtained legal status as an association and in 2006 the Survivors Foundation was officially established. The Foundation, which runs a victims

shelter and victims assistance center open to the public, seeks to help eradicate all forms of violence against women by combating impunity and providing legal support, psychological attention, and reintegration programs to help survivors reconstruct their lives, regain self-esteem and trust, and improve their quality of life.

As co-founder and director of NGO Survivors Foundation, Norma Cruz is a dedicated human rights activist who has worked tirelessly and courageously to defend female victims of domestic and sexual violence, trafficking in persons, illegal adoptions, and other crimes. Through her foundation, she has provided emotional, social, and legal support to hundreds of female victims seeking justice and protection. She has encouraged many women to overcome their fear of taking legal action against their abusers, and has fought for justice and action against their abusers, and has fought for justice and human dignity in a machista culture where women have been marginalized and where violence against women has been tolerated. Her efforts and achievements have contributed to the President's Freedom Agenda and have helped transform Guatemalan society. In 2007, she and her organization helped investigate, prosecute, and convict 30 individuals accused of murdering women.

In addition to establishing the Survivors Foundation, Norma Cruz has dedicated her life in social service to improving conditions for other vulnerable sectors of the population. After five years of exile, she returned to Guatemala in 1987 to defend the rights of victims of repression. She was a founding member of the Office of Multiple Services of the Religious Conference of Guatemala (CONFREGUA) (1988-1993), which attended to victims of violence during the armed conflict; Director of the Association for Education and

Development (ASEDE)(1991), which was created to implement programs for internally displaced populations; and Founder and Executive Director of the House of Services for Agrarian and Labor Rights (1994-2002), which sought to resolve land conflicts. She has provided training in workshops on sexual violence against children, labor rights, and women's rights; conducted research on gender and human rights; and participated in conferences on femicide in Latin America.

Engaging in efforts to ensure justice in Guatemala, notorious for its climate of impunity, rampant violence, and systemic corruption, is a very dangerous undertaking with little support network and little security. Human rights leaders, defenders, and witnesses have been killed for their work. Norma Cruz has received numerous death threats, including a recent death threat against a family member who was kidnapped, assaulted, and eventually released (ref B). At various times, her home has been under surveillance by unidentified individuals in suspicious vehicles. In 2007, the National Civil Police reported a total of 5,781 killings, including 559 killings of women, many of them violently with signs of torture and mutilation. A large number of killings of women are believed to be linked to organized crime, narcotrafficking, gangs, and child trafficking and child prostitution networks.

Cruz commented that in other countries, gangs protect women. But in Guatemala, a woman is considered "a trophy." Raping and killing a woman is part of the gang initiation process, she noted. The more cruel the death, the greater the respect accorded the gang member. Narcotraffickers kill to exact revenge, to mark their territory, or to settle an outstanding debt. At great risk to her own physical safety and that of her family, she has gone to extraordinary lengths to seek justice not only for her own daughter but for other daughters, mothers, and women who are not able to defend themselves. She has fought against Guatemala's male-dominated power structure, culture of impunity, and increasing level of violence, serving as an inspiration and symbol of courage and hope to women in Guatemala who are working for positive change. In light of Guatemala's difficult and unrelenting environment, Norma Cruz' determination and persistence in promoting women's rights and

justice have been all the more heroic.

¶3. The nominee was notified of this nomination. She confirmed that she would accept the award if selected and would be available to travel to Washington in March 2009.
McFarland